Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method for handling interactive information exchange through networks having a plurality of client machines, the method comprising the steps of:

composing a request message offering predetermined response options, whereby corresponding response messages are returned through said networks in one or more packets;

setting up packet forwarding rules in said networks specifying a particular treatment for said returned packets dependent on said predetermined response options;

sending said request message to said subset of client machines.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising an initial step of receiving a subscription message from a subset of said client machines.

3. The method according to claim 1, whereby said request message is composed in a way that said corresponding response message only consists of one packet.

4. The method according to claim 1, whereby said request message is composed in a way that said chosen predetermined response options is encoded in a data portion of said respective response packet.

5. The method according to claim 1, whereby said request message is composed in a hypertext document format and comprises a program that can be executed on the client

machines and composes said response messages upon an interaction of a user of a client machine.

6. The method according to claim 1, whereby setting up forwarding rules includes the step of configuring one or more routers that forward said response packets.

7. The method according to claim 6, whereby configuring said routers includes the step of instructing said routers to discard response messages containing predetermined response options.

8. The method according to claim 6, whereby configuring said routers includes the step of instructing said routers to forward response messages containing a certain response option to a specified host connected to one of said networks.

9. The method according to claim 6, whereby configuring said routers includes the step of instructing said routers to combine more than one response messages arriving in a given time frame and to forward the combined messages as one message.

10. The method according to claim 6, whereby configuring said routers includes the step of instructing at least one of said routers to store the selected option of said response options in conjunction with the identity of the sender.

11. The method according to claim 6, whereby configuring said routers includes the step of instructing at least one of said routers to determine the amount of received response messages for each response option.

12. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of receiving response messages and sending a second request message only to client machines from which a response message containing a certain response option was received.

13. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of receiving response messages and storing the options chosen grouped by said sending client machines.

14. A computer program product stored on a computer usable medium, comprising computer readable program means for causing a computer to perform a method according to claim 1.

15. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for handling interactive information exchange through networks having a plurality of client machines, said method comprising the steps of:

composing a request message offering predetermined response options, whereby corresponding response messages are returned through said networks in one or more packets;

setting up packet forwarding rules in said networks specifying a particular treatment for said returned packets dependent on said predetermined response options;

sending said request message to said subset of client machines.

16. A system for handling information exchange through computer networks having a plurality of client machines for interactive broadcasting, the system comprising

a host computer connected to one of said networks for composing a request message offering predetermined response options, whereby corresponding response messages are returned over said computer network in one or more packets and sending said request message to at least a subset of said plurality of client machines, and

an interface for setting up packet forwarding rules in said computer network specifying a particular treatment for said returned packets dependent on said predetermined response options.